THE TANALA, A HILL TRIBE OF MADAGASCAR

I. INTRODUCTION

The island of Madagascar lies off the southeast coast of Africa, /31/ with its long axis running approximately north-northeast by south-southwest. It is the third largest island in the world, with a length of approximately 1,000 miles and an average width of 250 miles. It includes regions of rather diverse climate and natural resources.

Along the eastern side of Madagascar, extending almost from end /33 to end, there is a series of mountain ranges. These mountains rise to an elevation of 2,000 meters in places and form the watershed for the entire island. From them rivers flow eastward into the Indian Ocean and westward into the Mozambique Channel. In the north, the mountains are abrupt and rise directly from the sea. As one goes southward, they become lower and less abrupt, gradually dying out toward the southern end of the island, and there is a narrow coastal plain. At the southern end of the mountains this plain turns westward and includes all the southern tip of the island.

On the western side of the massif there is a great plateau, also mountainous, which has an elevation of about 1,000 meters in the central part. This slopes off gradually toward the west and south. Along its western edge there are broken mountain ranges, lower than those on the east.

The eastern slope of the massif and the eastern coastal plain are /32 characterized by an extremely hot and humid climate. It rains almost daily during all months. Coast and mountains are covered by a dense growth of tropical jungle, so heavy as to be almost impassable. This is the most unhealthy part of the island and fever takes a heavy toll [164] of both Europeans and plateau natives.

The plateau is characterized by a rather dry, temperate climate with a moderate seasonal rainfall. From late May to early September there is hardly any rain and the temperature falls almost to the freezing point at night. Traditionally, the eastern and central [137] parts of the plateau were once densely forested and this is borne out by the occasional finding of large logs buried in swamps. Agriculture by the cutting and burning method, coupled with cattle grazing, has completely deforested it and most of it is now open grass land. This region is comparatively healthy and there is said to have been [196] little or no fever here prior to the construction of the railroad from Tananarive to the east coast.